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TAJIKISTAN

SUCCESS STORY

Performing Empowerment, Changing Minds

Two young women in Tajikistan change attitudes about girls' education



Photo Credit: Mikhail Romanyuk

Robiyai facilitates a workshop for her peers in Chorku, teaching them to use theater to engage local audiences in discussions about community issues.

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– Faroiz, YTP participant

In Chorku, a small community in Tajikistan's Isfara district, only 42% of girls continue their studies after 9th grade, but Faroiz Makhkamova and Robiyai Amirullo are changing attitudes about girls' education.

Intrigued by a performance staged by participants of USAID's Youth Theater for Peace (YTP) project, Robiyai asked to join the local YTP drama group and quickly gained respect among peers and teachers for her leadership on stage. Her parents, too, were very proud. "They started to believe in my capability to learn new things. As a result, I became one of the best students in the whole school," says Robiyai. "Now my parents want me to continue my studies after 9th grade. YTP helped me to understand and analyze problems in my community and to look broadly at the issues happening around me in society."

Faroiz's parents agreed to let her delay her marriage when she was selected for a YTP summer camp and have since delayed it again due to Faroiz's insistence that she continue her studies and enter university. "After attending the YTP camp, I can sit together with my father and talk, which we hardly did before," says Faroiz. "We discuss my participation at the performances and the issues that we present, and he has become interested in my achievements in school and my interest in studies."

Knowing that not all girls in their community are so lucky, Faroiz and Robiyai staged a play on girls' education that inspired lively discussion among the audience. "To my surprise, most of the audience agreed that girls should continue school after 9th grade and acknowledged that girls' education impacts the whole development of our society," Robiyai noted.

The dialogue aroused by such performances can also lead to surprising outcomes. "This year our school opened an extra 10th grade class because of the increased number of girls who want to continue their education," claims Robiyai. "I think society has made some progress in increasing girls' education, but YTP pushes it and makes people think about it out loud."